

Washington Roundup

Missile Disguise

White House and Pentagon officials believe that the discovery by the USAF/TRW KH-11 reconnaissance satellite of an SS-20 ballistic missile in its canister alongside an encapsulated SS-16 ICBM was an effort by the Soviet Union to disguise the two weapons. Both were positioned alongside the SS-20 mobile launcher during recent Soviet war games, and officials believe this was so that Russian reconnaissance spacecraft could compare the two and that steps could be taken to improve the similarity. The SS-20 uses the first two stages of the SS-16 and it has been deployed extensively as an intermediate-range or theater nuclear weapon. The SS-20 has three MIRVs while the SS-16 is armed with a single reentry vehicle with a nuclear warhead yield of 0.65 megaton and an accuracy of 0.26 naut. mi. at 9.150 km. range. In the SALT 2 agreement, the USSR promised not to produce the third stage for the SS-16, the reentry vehicle or the device to target the reentry vehicle of the missile.

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